

THE SHAKERITE

Volume 95 // Issue 3

Jan. 24, 2025

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Meet the new
head of SHHS,

PRINCIPAL WYATT

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Have We Found Our Long-term Leader?

Isaiah Wyatt has a tough job ahead of him. But having spoken with him about his plans as principal, I am hopeful about his chances to succeed.

Immediately after former Principal Eric Juli announced his resignation to the high school faculty Nov. 18, I spoke with Wyatt during a meeting with Dr. David Glasner, superintendent, and Executive Director of Communications Scott Stephens.

During the meeting, Wyatt made sure to say that the most important change he wants to make is to improve unity within the high school. He said that if we all work together, the school environment will be stronger.



ELIOT CALL
Editor-in-Chief

To illustrate that point, Wyatt asked me to stand up and link arms with him, Glasner and Stephens.

He also expressed interest in getting to know me. He asked questions about my hobbies and activities around and outside of school. He immediately made me feel comfortable.

I see that same comfort when Wyatt interacts with students in the halls. It feels good to have a principal who expresses such a positive attitude.

However, a positive vibe and focus on unity are not enough to ensure success. As principal it is your responsibility to bring stability to the building. A positive vibe does help unify the school environment, but it doesn't necessarily keep the school safe.

There is finally a new plan for a safety protocol. The central administration and Board of Education agreed to institute walk-through weapon-detection in the high school, and students encountered OpenGate systems when they entered school this week.

In Issue 1, I expressed the urgent need and desire for weapon detection in the high school. Juli's main objective this year was to find a safe and efficient way into the school.

After five years of telling the Board of Education that the building is not safe, Juli succeeded in establishing security screenings after three weapons incidents occurred during one September week. The system of wand and bag searches was not ideal, but it forced the BOE to act. I am extremely grateful for that accomplishment.

Thus far, Wyatt has done a good job in reinforcing the phone policy. I have seen administrators enter my classes once or twice a day to look for phones.

No matter how people feel about the policy itself, it's important to see the staff enforcing it. The same goes for his renewed effort in clearing the hallways with hall sweeps.

Wyatt marks the sixth principal, interim or otherwise, that SHHS has had in nine years. I'm graduating in June; I hope that Wyatt can prove to be a successful interim principal who can become the long-term leader our school needs for the sake of stability.

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On the Cover

ALISON TEETER
Design Managing Editor

This is the first edition of The Shakerite to be published during Isaiah Wyatt's tenure as interim principal. The cover shot, taken by Photo Editor Camryn Dozier, captures Wyatt speaking to students during a Jan. 8 assembly. Visible in the background are three photos of him at his graduations from high school, college and graduate school, each captioned by his GPA at each school: 1.7, 2.8 and 3.5, respectively. Wyatt opened up about his struggles as a student and how he was able to succeed through perseverance. The assembly gave many a first glimpse into his deeply empathetic and warmhearted character.

I first met Wyatt at the end of the last school year while I was touring the Innovative Center for Personalized Learning, where he was the assistant principal. I talked with him about the program, and he spoke with captivatingly genuine enthusiasm. Wyatt wasn't delivering a sales pitch; he was delivering an expression of pride in the IC and all of its students and staff. I'm now taking three classes there, and I've never enjoyed school more.

When he was named interim principal in the middle of the school year, Wyatt had to leave the IC for the main campus. After his departure, he took the time to send each IC student a handwritten letter wishing them the best for the remainder of the school year. I have no doubt that he will care for SHHS students in the same compassionate way as interim principal.



THE SHAKERITE

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WHY SOME STUDENTS AVOID YONDR

Students cite need to stay in touch with family at school and at home as reasons for ignoring policy

NYLA JAMISON

Journalism I Reporter

A freshman student follows rules. She wears an ID. She uses a hall pass. She does her homework.

“I always make sure to wear my ID and have it on before I enter the school, even going to lengths to make sure I have an extra one in my backpack in case I forgot one at home,” she said.

But since the start of the school year, this student has ignored the high school’s newest rule about locking away phones — and not for the reason adults might think.

“Me and my mom both agreed that it’s safer to not have my phone in my pouch in case something happens,” said the freshman, who is not named in this story to prevent consequences for violating the policy.

The student’s mom said she is concerned about safety. “Way too often there’s a mass school shooting, or other sick and violent acts we see on the news,” she said. “Having direct access to my child and my child having direct access to me is a comfort and confidence we both need.”

She said that her daughter having access to her phone would bring her comfort. “I trust my parenting, although not perfect. I’d prefer to be her first contact in the face of any negative situations she may encounter,” she said.

The district is using Yondr pouches to manage student cell phones and electronic communication devices during the 2024-25 school year. Yondr pouches are small fabric bags that are locked and unlocked with a unique magnet. The policy complies with House Bill 250, which Gov. Mike DeWine signed May 15. The law requires public schools to enact written policies that restrict student cell phone use during school hours by July 2025. The district began researching and drafting their cell phone policy in 2023.

Now with the first semester of school complete, some students have settled on not using the pouch.

A junior said that she doesn’t lock her phone away because of her after-school activities. “I know I won’t always have time to unlock my phone, then go to conferences, then change for practice all within 50 minutes. I have practice at 4 p.m. every day,” she said.

One freshman said that she doesn’t put her phone in her pouch because she has siblings at the high school. “It’s easier for us to communicate so we can leave faster,” she said.

A sophomore doesn’t lock away his phone for privacy reasons. “If I have to be contacted about personal stuff, I don’t want my teacher



Photo Illustration by Alison Teeter and Danial Carroll

or other people to know,” he said.

A senior said that she doesn’t use her Yondr pouch because she wants to have immediate contact with her family in case of emergency. “I’m terrified for something to happen and I can’t get into immediate contact with my parents,” she said.

Students who do not lock their phones in pouches are mostly keeping them out of adults’ sight. Administrators said they have not seen too many phones outside of pouches so far.

Assistant Principal Katie Slifkin said she asks students about 10 times a day to lock their phones in their pouches. She thinks that the policy is helping the school. “In my opinion, yes, the Yondr pouches have helped our school culture,” she said. In particular, she said, the policy is leading to “a reduction in drama and fighting.”

Slifkin said that instead of being on social media all day, students have more social interaction, especially in the cafeteria. “The cafeteria is flooded with student conversations and laughter rather than everyone on their devices at lunch,” she said.

Associate Principal James Dubsky also said that the policy has improved student life. “Yondr pouches is a little of a change, but a positive change,” he said.

Based on Dubsky’s experiences so far, he said, students are on board with the policy.

He said that during September and October,

when he told students to lock their phones in their pouches during manual bag checks, students cooperated. “No kids argue or cuss,” he said.

Angela Harrell, who teaches Financial Algebra, said that she never has to tell her students to put their phone away in class. She said that she typically only sees one or two students with their phones out in the hallways. “Absolutely, it’s helping culture — improvement on grades, connecting with other students and changing the morale,” Harrell said.

Librarian Technician Kim Harris said that she tells students to put their phones away about three times per day. She said she sees students with iPads, cellphones and, mostly, headphones. “Generally speaking, I feel that it is helping to have Yondr bags and that the concept of removing phones is long overdue,” she said.

With the implementation of walk-through weapons detection this week, however, students who have not been using their Yondr pouch may run into trouble. According to a Jan. 18 district message to students and parents, students must remove their electronic devices before passing through the new weapons-detection system, and phones must be locked in Yondr pouches. Students whose phones are not locked away will have them confiscated for the day, and their parents will be notified of the confiscation by phone call.

“Having direct access to my child and my child having direct access to me is a comfort and confidence we both need.”

a Shaker parent

WYATT WANTS SHHS TO WORK TOGETHER

ISABEL SIEGEL
Managing Editor

Interim Principal Isaiah Wyatt can sum his approach for the rest of the 2024-25 school year in three words: “Listening, learning and leading.”

Wyatt, who became assistant principal of the Innovative Center for Personalized Learning in August 2023, has been named interim SHHS principal for the remainder of the 2024-25 school year. He replaces Eric Juli, who resigned eight weeks ago after serving as principal since 2019. Wyatt is the third interim principal of the high school since 2015 and the sixth man to lead the building in the last nine years.

According to shaker.org, the IC is a “non-traditional high school experience” that gives students more choice over “when, where, how and what they learn.” It is located on Lee Road in the Stephanie Tubbs Jones Community Center, but students are only required to spend 51 percent of each school week on campus.

Wyatt graduated from McKinley High School in Canton. He earned both his bachelor’s degree in physical and health education and his master’s degree in counselor education at Malone University.

Before coming to Shaker, Wyatt worked as an assistant football coach at Malone. He later worked as a school counselor at McKinley High School, and was an assistant principal in the Canton City School District.

During a Jan. 8 school assembly, Wyatt spoke to students about his expectations for the rest of the school year and the upcoming implementation of a walk-through weapon-detection system at the high school. He also talked about his

experience as a student and displayed a slide that included his high school, undergraduate and graduate GPAs, which were 1.7, 2.8, and 3.5 respectively.

“I showed you that to be vulnerable and to tell you that I’m not perfect,” Wyatt said during the assembly. “To tell you that none of the adults in this room — none of us are perfect. I personally have been every kind of student that you could be. And it’s not about how you start; it’s how you finish.”

At McKinley, Wyatt advised a group of Black male students called the McKinley Men of Honor. “I was able to shape my lens as an educator, and for that to be rooted in a lens of care,” he said of the experience. “Knowing that relationships are at the start of everything we do.”

Working at the IC allowed Wyatt to experience a nontraditional approach to education. “It helped me understand instructional practices in a creative, outside-the-box way,” he said. “How to listen to what they [students] want out of their experience and make it happen.”

At the IC, Wyatt often spoke to students about their progress on personal projects, and would offer ideas. “I may give the kid an idea or make a connection to a community member that may help with that student’s project,” he said.

Wyatt said that during his first few weeks as interim principal, he visited all the academic departments in the high school. He also met with the Student Superintendent Advisory Committee and junior Student Council, and visited Crew classes.

“I feel like I sensed joy from our students,” Wyatt said. “I was able to go in classrooms and the cafeteria, see students at games.”



Isaiah Wyatt displays a shirt that expresses his belief in unity during a Jan. 8 assembly in the large aud. *Camryn Dozier*

Wyatt plans to approach his position as interim principal collaboratively. “My approach is going to be to listen, and my approach is gonna be to be visible — be on the ground so to speak, and work with our student body to understand what’s important to you guys,” Wyatt said. “[And] work with our staff to understand what’s important from a teacher and staff standpoint, and also work with our administrative team to make sure that I’m properly supporting them for the work that they’re doing to lead the building.”

Wyatt also aims to reduce chronic absenteeism. “What are the things that they’re facing?” he said. “What are the supports that are needed?”

Wyatt said he is emphasizing Yondr pouch implementation to ensure that ev-

ery student has their devices locked away in order to be engaged in classes. He also wants to connect with the community during his time as interim principal, and plans to invite residents to interact with the weapon-detection systems that students will walk through upon entering school beginning Jan. 22.

Wyatt plans to be “visible and showing up at our events, showing up at our games and just trying to interact with people,” Wyatt said.

Progress will be a collective effort, he said. “The greatest thing is that it’s not just falling on one person. Everyone in the building is working together to be able to accomplish these things and also reset in a positive way.”

Spotlight Editor Olivia Cavallo contributed to reporting.



Isaiah Wyatt speaks with junior Za’Nyah Williams, junior Deborah Butler and senior Mia Barefoot in the senior lounge of the cafeteria Jan. 17. Wyatt, former assistant principal of the Innovative Center for Personalized Learning, has promoted collaboration and transparency in his new role as interim principal of the high school. *Camryn Dozier*

Students Glad to See Black Representation in Principal’s Office

VIJAYA SADLER
City Reporter

Interim Principal Isaiah Wyatt is one of four Black principals currently leading buildings in the Shaker Heights City Schools District.

Former SHHS Assistant Principal George Clark leads Lomond Elementary School, Roneisha Campbell heads Mercer, and Dora Bechtel is Onaway principal.

The district will soon hire a principal for its eighth building, the Ludlow Early Learning Center, which is to open next school year.

Junior Za’Nyah Williams is excited about Wyatt’s arrival. “It’s exciting to see someone in that position being a Black person,” she said.

Including Shaker, there are seven Greater Cleveland Conference schools; three are led by Black principals, including SHHS. The others are Euclid High

School and Cleveland Heights High School.

While more than half of the district’s current building leaders are Black, in recent years, the percentage of K-12 Black administrators nationally has declined from 18.4 percent to 9.5 percent, according to a report from the U.S. Department of Education.

Fifteen percent of public school students nationally and 47.8 percent of Shaker Heights High School students are Black.

Senior Chloe Harper said that having a Black principal builds “more diversity in our school. The school feels like a better community, and he might connect more with Black students who may struggle with identity, environment and mental health issues.”

Junior Korei Washington is happy to see Black representation. “I’m glad that we have a Black interim principal be-

cause I love to see Black representation, and I honestly hope to see Mr. Wyatt make a change within our school,” she said. “I hope he improves the school’s climate and safety and lessens the ban on electronic items.”

While some students appreciate having a Black interim principal, other students and staff don’t see race as a priority with a new principal. “It doesn’t matter what gender or race our principal is; it matters about what they can do for us as students,” Williams said.

History teacher Joseph Konopinski just wants the principal to have a plan. “I want someone who has a plan to deal with students cutting class, students walking the halls, and somebody who values teacher planning time and after-school student conferences,” he said.

“As long as the person we hire has a plan to deal with those things, it would make me happy.”



After serving as principal for five years, Eric Juli's last day at the high school was Nov. 26. In an email sent to staff, parents and students Nov. 18, Juli revealed he had resigned. He explained that leading the school through Covid and recent changes left him exhausted and subject to constant criticism. Juli's leadership has undeniably been impactful, and his achievements in school safety are unmatched in SHHS history.

At this point, the community's biggest question has shifted from why Juli resigned to what comes next.

Isaiah Wyatt, who was assistant principal at the Innovative Center for Personalized Learning at the time of Juli's resignation, has served as SHHS interim principal since Dec. 2. Juli's permanent replacement, who has not yet been chosen, will not assume the post until next school year.

In the past, the district has initiated national searches for a new high school principal completed by search firms that suggested candidates who were eventually hired, including Juli and his predecessor, Jonathan Kuehnle, who was hired in 2016, placed on administrative leave in November 2018 and reassigned to administrative duties in January 2019. According to Executive Director of Communications and Public Relations Scott Stephens, the district is not currently conducting a principal search, but the high school's next principal will be identified in the coming months. Wyatt will be considered for the position. No timeline has been specified beyond that.

Hiring a permanent principal will undoubtedly require significant forethought and planning; here are a few things that we would like the district to consider.

Juli's contribution to SHHS security must not be overlooked, and it is essential that our next principal equally prioritizes school safety. After the high school endured weeks of manual bag checks and metal-detection wandering, the district agreed that a walk-through weapons-detection system would be implemented by Dec. 2. However, in an email sent to the community Nov. 22, Superintendent David Glasner announced that the date had been pushed

back. Walk-through detection was to begin Jan 22.

So far, Wyatt's comments to staff and students indicate that he supports the plan to use weapon-detecting technology and that he is committed to the enforcement of the high school's security policies.

Juli also addressed attendance by implementing equitable tardy policies. In 2023, the high school instituted a policy that included consequences for accumulating too many tardies without punishing students who faced legitimate barriers to arriving on time. Juli also purchased tardy kiosks to track attendance and stationed them in the lower cafeteria, where late students are now required to enter. While not the high school's first effort to reduce tardiness, Juli's approach was the first to account for the legitimate obstacles that some students face when getting to school on time in a district that does not bus high school students.

In his brief time as interim principal, Wyatt has reiterated ID requirements and instituted hall sweeps. Clearing halls is both an academic and security practice; it cuts down on hall conflicts and encourages students to attend class, but it also makes an intruder easier to spot. Although hall sweeps were implemented during Juli's tenure, they were never practiced as consistently, and never with as much emphasis as we are experiencing now. Sweeps have been conducted nearly every day, every period, since Wyatt began his tenure.

During a Jan. 8 assembly in the large auditorium, in addition to discussing security and fostering a sense of community, Wyatt emphasized his commitment to improved communication. In the past, the district's communication has not always been timely or clear. Wyatt recognized the need for better messaging and its role in improving the high school's policies, culture and climate.

Although we recognize that our future principal, whoever it may be, will differ from Juli as a person and as a leader, we hope that individual will maintain Juli's commitment to school safety and improved attendance and communication.

We All Scream For Yondring

DANIEL CARROLL
Copy Chief

The Yondr pouch policy hit students like a rampaging garbage truck, and they spent the first semester adjusting to a phone-free environment.

Now, The Shakerite has discovered new details about an expansion of the phone policy.

A few mouse clicks at shaker.org will take you to a disturbing page titled, "The Yondr Manifesto." The page outlines in excruciating detail what changes will further torment students in the coming months.

Students who ignore the policy should be afraid. Those who are repeatedly caught with un-pouched phones will be forced to wear a brand new, top-of-the line Yondr jumpsuit. The jumpsuit features a magnet-locked mouth zipper, flippers that make obnoxious squeaks in the hallways, and lice.

Students can shed their confining jumpsuit at 3:10 p.m., at which time they must waddle out the front entrance and immediately endure a humiliating disrobing process that employs magnets, scissors and up to an hour of struggle and perspiration.

The Yondr Room is the next stop for students who persist in accessing their phones during the school day. You may have heard screeches coming from the basement; those are just the test subjects.

Ignore them. Everything is fine.

According to the company's website, "Yondr works with educators, artists, organizations and individuals around the world to create phone-free spaces where genuine connection, focus, and creativity can flourish in the absence of technology."

Due to mounting pressure from the phone-containment company, Yondr-focused classes are already being considered for next year's curriculum. AP Yondr History could replace APUSH, and Yondr & Conditioning would see students push their strength to the limit while trying to smash open as many Yondr pouches as they can.

Taking it too far? Ridiculous! Here's what the Board of Education has to say about it: "The Board directs the Superintendent/designee to develop procedures governing student use of cellphones that permit a student to use a cellphone or other electronic communications device for student learning or to monitor or address a health concern if included in a student's individualized education program or plan, a 504 plan or other reason deemed appropriate by the Superintendent/designee to monitor a student health concern."

Dr. John Moore, curriculum director, has proposed adding Board of Education to the World Language program.

These rules apply to all; yet, in an act of betrayal, former Principal Eric Juli was discovered Nov. 26 to have been using his iPhone to order Chipotle. On that very night, he was taken away by the Yondr Squad in a surprise sting operation, never to be seen again.

A HAIRSTYLE REBORN

Despite its history as the butt of jokes, the mullet lives on

LUCAS TCHEUREKDJIAN

Journalism I Reporter

The mullet is a state of mind,” said Nick LaPete, choir teacher and mullet sporter.

For LaPete and many others, the mullet hairstyle, characterized by its short front and long back, represents self-expression and individuality “It’s really whatever you want it to be,” LaPete said.

In a surprising twist of fashion fate, the mullet, characterized by its short front and long back, has made a triumphant return. What was once considered a relic of hairstyles past is now being embraced by celebrities, influencers and everyday individuals, sparking a cultural revival that has left people scratching their non-mullet heads in disbelief.

The mullet gained popularity in the United States in the 1980s, but its roots can be traced back to cultures including the ancient Greeks, ancient Romans and the Nez Perce Tribe in modern-day Idaho.

In the 1980s, the hairstyle was embraced by rock stars such as Billy Ray Cyrus and Axl Rose, as well as athletes such as Mike Modano and Wayne Gretzky. The mullet became a symbol of rebellion and nonconformity and it was further popularized by the Beastie Boys, who used the term in their 1994 song “Mullet Head.”

Math teacher and former mullet sporter Ryan T. Routh said that the classic mullet was a way to express meaning and identity. “The length in the back was meaningful. There was a lot of meaning in all parts of the mullet you were communicating, through the length in the back, through what you’re doing on the top,” he said.

Shaker parent Jorge Castilla, who participated in the 2021 USA Mullet Championship, said that baseball players such as Jose Canseco also popularized the mullet in the 1980s. Similarly, Routh said that Canadian hockey players, such as Gretzky, brought the mullet to the United States.

The evolution of the mullet from its classic form to modern interpretations reflects broader changes in fashion, culture and individual expression. Often, the short front and sides conveyed a sense of practicality and a no-nonsense attitude, while the longer back could symbolize a connection to more rebellious or

free-spirited ideals. This contrast allowed individuals to balance professionalism with individuality or counterculture.

TikTok and Instagram have played a pivotal role in the mullet’s revival. Viral hashtags such as #MulletMonday and #MulletChallenge encourage users to showcase their own takes on the hairstyle. Some people create over-the-top “business in the front, party in the back” looks, featuring accessories such as neon sunglasses or stuffed animals tucked into the back of their hair.

Etymologists attribute the word mullet to its 1857 usage, mullet-head, which meant “stupid, dull person.” That expression may have derived from the name of a fish called a mullet-head, which had a wide head and was not the smartest creature in the sea. The connection between the 19th century usage and modern views of mullet wearers accounts for some of the mullet humor that appears in social media feeds.

Today, the mullet has been spotted on red carpets and music festivals. Miley Cyrus and Lil Nas X have boosted mullet interest online.

Google Trends shows that the search term “mullet” reached its peak popularity between 2004 and today.

Myia Simons, a hairstylist at The Gentlemen’s Cave Luxury Barber Lounge in Shaker Heights, has styled plenty of mullets during her 21-year career. “From my experience, caucasian boys and men are the ones who are getting the mullet,” she said. Simons recently gave mullet haircuts to a full middle school baseball team and to members of a basketball team. “The mullet has come full circle, like many fashion trends,” Simons said.

“The art of barbering has progressed so drastically that the mullet is now defined with a certain reputation.”

However, the revival of the mullet is not without its critics. Routh said that mullets are not attractive. “I don’t think they’re stylish. They’re outdated and, as with many things, I feel like the new generation is making fun of us,” Routh said.

Freshman Issac Lazar noted the role of humor. “I think the mullet has come back because some people think they are funny,” he said.

Some fashion purists argue that the hairstyle should remain in the past because of the way it is mocked in the media. These portrayals often depict the mullet as emblematic of working-class culture, reinforcing stereotypes that link the hairstyle to a lack of sophistication or social status.

Despite this argument, Castilla remains a fan. “I think the mullet is very stylish and timeless, and looks great in both casual and formal settings,” he said.

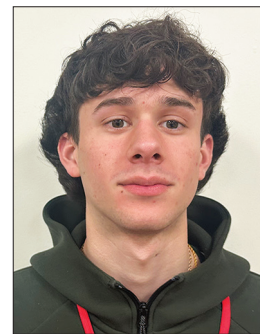
Simons also emphasized the style’s appeal. She said, “I think that mullets look awesome and that people shouldn’t badger it.”



Nick LaPete, choir teacher, wears a traditional business-in-the-front, party-in-the-back mullet. *Photos by Camryn Dozier*



Students Tell Their Mullet Stories



Henry Narens
Age 18
Senior

“I first got it winter last year for lax, and I just stuck with it. I asked for a modern mullet at first, and since then it’s been even out the back with the top and shave the sides.”



Gideon Polster
Age 15
Sophomore

“I asked for a mullet; that’s all I know.”



Ihsan Akkus
Age 18
Senior

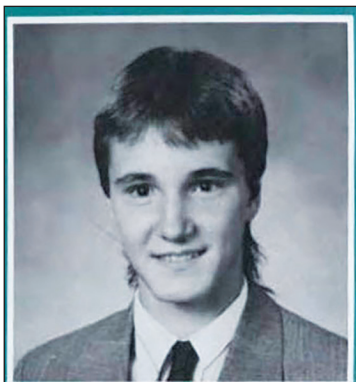
“I Basically took my clippers to Asher Baskind’s back yard and told him clean up the sides/back and chop some of the top off.”



Isaac Luzar
Age 15
Freshman

“My brother had a mullet, so I got one. I asked my barber Sean to hook me up with a nice mullet. You don’t have to maintain the sides at all and you can just have a nice flow.”

Photos by Daniel Carroll and Vaughn Ullom



Ryan Routh

Ryan Routh, math teacher, sported a mullet for his high school yearbook picture.

Courtesy of Ryan Routh

FROM HIGH SCHOOL TO THE NBA, IN PRINT

The Athletic's Joe Vardon tells journalism students how he made the jump from covering politics to the LeBron James beat

ISABEL SIEGEL AND MAIZY MACHMER-WESSELS

Managing Editor Journalism I Reporter

“I just wanted to be around sports.”

Joe Vardon, senior NBA writer for The Athletic, visited SHHS Jan. 9 and spoke to more than 80 journalism students during an in-school field trip in the small auditorium.

Vardon graduated from Tallmadge High School in 1998. He was sports editor for The Devil's Tale, the school newspaper, and played football and baseball. Shakerite adviser Natalie Sekicky, who invited Vardon to speak, was his journalism teacher from 1995-97. After high school, he earned a bachelor's degree in communications at The College of Wooster, where he played four years of varsity baseball.

In high school, Vardon didn't anticipate a career in journalism. “I certainly didn't start at the high school newspaper with any intention of being a real journalist,” he said.

But the staff of The Devil's Tale covered a conflict between the Tallmadge City Schools and a landowner that refused to sell vacant land to the district to use as a site for a new high school. Vardon said that his experiences at The Devil's Tale “lit a fire” in him, showing him “the power of being a journalist and holding people accountable.”

In college, Vardon had to turn down the opportunity to play in a collegiate summer baseball league due to a family member's illness. Instead, he worked at the Akron Beacon Journal unloading unsold newspapers in the mornings and pushing the mail cart around the newsroom in the afternoon. After giving the sports editor a sample of his high school writing, he was offered a job helping them cover high school football on Friday nights.

“That is how I got my job, my start into newspapers,” Vardon said.

Vardon later covered Ohio politics, including both Democratic Gov. Rod Strickland and Republican Gov. John Kasich, at the Columbus Dispatch for four years. He said that covering politics in Columbus gave him more purpose than any other job. “You feel different because politicians are paid by you,” he said. “And they're taking your money and doing things with it. You feel like as a journalist it's your job to represent and/or protect the people and the people's interests. It's almost like every day you felt like your notepad was a shield, and maybe the pen was a sword,” Vardon said. “Almost like I was going into battle for something bigger than myself.”

In 2014, Vardon left the Dispatch to join the Cleveland Plain Dealer as its LeBron James reporter, becoming a pioneer in covering an individual athlete rather than a team or a sport. “Working in Columbus wore on me,” Vardon said of his return to sportswriting. “I was ready for a change.”



Joe Vardon, senior NBA writer at The Athletic, shares stories of his beginnings as a journalist during an in-school field trip in the small auditorium Jan. 9. Journalism I, Sports Writing, News Production and Media Literacy students attended the assembly. Vardon was Shakerite adviser Natalie Sekicky's student at Tallmadge High School from 1995-1997, where he was sports editor for the THS student newspaper, The Devil's Tale. This was Vardon's second appearance before SHHS journalism students. He last visited in 2014, when he was covering Gov. John Kasich for the Columbus Dispatch. Soon after that visit, Vardon became the Cleveland Plain Dealer's LeBron James beat reporter when James returned to the Cleveland Cavaliers. This move drew national attention because it was a novel approach to covering a single athlete. Vardon told students that to cover James or a governor, you have to get know the people around them. You also have to remember that although you develop relationships with the person you are covering, you are not friends. *Photo by Eamonn Furey*

In a 2015 photo, Vardon interviews LeBron James at the Cavs' practice facility in Independence. *Courtesy of Joe Vardon*

During the COVID-19 outbreak, Vardon was one of 12 journalists invited to live among players, coaches and staff in the 2020 NBA Bubble at Walt Disney's Coronado Springs Resort in Lake Buena Vista, Florida. The biosecure bubble was created by the NBA to protect players from the virus during the final eight games of the season and the playoffs. Vardon reported from the bubble for three months, beginning each day with a nose-swab test.

Vardon said being in the bubble provided normality while people were isolating at home. “It was refreshing to be around people again during the pandemic,” he said. “I was able to develop relationships I wouldn't have otherwise been able to at the time.”

Vardon eventually became the Cavs reporter for cleveland.com and covered the 2016 NBA Finals, when the Cavs won Cleveland's first sports championship since 1964. “It is a moment I wouldn't trade for the world,” he said.

“Being from here, just like all of you, and growing up loving Cleveland sports just like all of you – you can imagine how important that was to me personally,” he said of the experience. “Just to be in a position to connect these millions of fans and people who grew up just like I did – that's a moment of my career that I would never give back.”

In 2006, when asked in a job interview where he wanted to be in five years, Vardon said he wanted to cover sports for The New York Times. “They both looked at me like I had three heads,” he said. “The New York Times was never a sports publication. But I loved the prestige, the power of the brand and the work that they do in covering the world.”

In 2018, Vardon accepted an offer to work at The Athletic, which is now a New York Times publication with more than 11 million subscribers. “Here I am, all these years later, as a national writer for basically The New York Times' sports department,” he said. “It's certainly a ‘pinch me’ moment there.”

Vardon shared that while covering James, he once called Buckingham Palace when James broke royal protocol by putting his sweaty arm around Princess Kate when she and Prince William posed for a picture with him after a game. “I had to call Buckingham Palace to get them on the record,” he said.

The same night, James and other Cavs players wore “I Can't Breathe” shirts during warm-ups in protest of police shootings of unarmed Black citizens. “That's just one of a thousand examples of how the editors of the Plain Dealer made the right call to have someone to just cover LeBron because by that time he certainly wasn't just a basketball player,” Vardon said.

Vardon said that his career has offered him life-changing experiences. “I've been to two Olympics,” he said. “I have walked the Great Wall of China. I have been to the top of the mountain in Rio. I've been standing in the middle of Paris at 1:30 in the morning, watching the blinking lights of the Eiffel Tower go out for the final time.”

Vardon said, “You have to expose yourself to things you don't understand. At some point, you'll find your voice.”

Ohio Public Schools Deserve Chances to Win State Titles, Too

Ohio's high school athletics postseason system perpetuates a competitive disadvantage for public schools.

Since 2010, private schools have won 80 percent of Ohio Division I football titles. During that interval, Pickerington Central won two titles, and Olentangy Liberty captured the title this year.

With few recent exceptions, Ohio public school teams struggle to compete with private school programs because their ability to recruit maintains their superiority.



SPENCER ZBANEK
Raider Zone Editor

St. Ignatius has won six straight Division I men's soccer championships since 2019. The Wildcats won 67 consecutive games from 2019-2022.

St. Edward won three consecutive Division I football championships from 2021-23. Their 2023 roster included three offensive

linemen with an average height of 6'6" and an average weight of 302 pounds. Two of the linemen committed to Ohio State and one committed to Michigan.

The Eagles' domination is even greater on the mat; the team has racked up 25 wrestling state championships since 1997.

The advantage is not only in the most popular high school sports. Hawken won the Division II women's swimming championship from 1999-2022 consecutively.

St. Edward has won 67 state championships across all sports. St. Ignatius has accumulated 47, and their Cincinnati counterpart St. Xavier has 64.

While all students who attend public school must live within district boundaries, a private school draws talent from all over. Today, when the focus of high school sports has shifted from fun to playing at the next level and earning NIL riches, private schools will only grow more dominant because of their notable reputations for producing college athletes.

St. Edward and St. Ignatius are prominent programs with connections across the NCAA. Playing for a coach who consistently sends players to major college programs is an appealing option.

Although not yet possible in Ohio, 38 states allow high school athletes to profit from their name, image or likeness. In these states, top high school athletes are inking four- and five-figure deals before they reach college.

Ohio should follow the lead of states such as Texas, Florida, Virginia and Louisiana, which offer unique public and private school championships. Other states force private schools to compete in higher-enrollment divisions.

Coaches, athletes, students and staff deserve a realistic chance to celebrate a Shaker state title. Ohio should separate public and private school championships.

LENAHAN DOMINATES THE RINK

VAUGHN ULLOM
Raider Zone Editor

Ryan Lenahan, senior hockey captain, tallied 15 goals and 18 assists through December.

After the Raiders fell 4-0 in the season opener to Walsh Jesuit, the team bounced back with a four-goal, three-assist performance from Lenahan in the Jamie Ruffner Memorial. The performance earned him November Great Lakes Hockey League Player of the Week recognition.

Lenahan said the award validates his hard work. "I think getting that award shows that I can go up and compete and produce for any team we play," said Lehan, who aims to win the award again this season. "It takes determination, but I'm up for the challenge."

Lenahan credited the success to his offseason goals. "I set out a goal for myself to increase my speed. I knew that's what I lacked from the previous season, so I hopped on the bike every day over the summer," he said.

Lenahan encourages his teammates to set goals as well. "I ask my teammates what they want out of the year and help them achieve it," he said.



Ryan Lenahan winds up to shoot during a 5-2 win against Meadville Dec. 8 at Bartley Arena. Photo by Matt Moore

Lenahan said that teammate Connor Mayhugh assisted his recent success. "He is a flat-out scorer and I am glad he's by my side every day in practice and for games," he said.

Becoming a team captain has accelerated Lenahan's growth. "I think when you are a captain, you gain confidence and understand that some of the underclassmen look up to you as a role model. You don't want to disappoint them," he said.

Sophomore forward Colin Arth has benefitted from Lenahan's perfor-

mance. "His production has helped a lot because it motivates the people around him to want to work harder and produce more," he said.

"He makes us hold ourselves to a higher standard and makes us take accountability for our mistakes," Arth said.

Lenahan understands there is still work to be done, but players are finding their rhythm. Said Lenahan, "I think we can get back on track, but we all need to buy in. We are getting closer and closer every day."

FAVRET NETS POINTS IN PAINT

EAMONN FUREY
Raider Zone Editor

Senior basketball captain and center Lizzy Favret averaged 15.8 points, 10.3 rebounds, three steals and two blocks through the Raider's first 14 games.

The 6-foot-3-inch Favret, who also plays soccer, will play Division I basketball at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee next year.

Head Coach Greg McIntosh praised her leadership.

"Lizzy leads with positivity and trust in her teammates," he said. "She's always encouraging her teammates and making sure they stay positive in tough times."

Favret's effort in the paint has helped the Raiders to a 6-9 mark, good for fifth place in the Greater Cleveland Conference. Her highest-scoring game came Dec. 3 in a victory over Bedford. She tallied 23 points, 15 rebounds, five steals and three blocks.

Favret said she wants to improve as much as possible before beginning her Division I collegiate career.

"I use it as motivation. I want to be the best player I can be at Milwaukee," she said.

Junior forward Joelle Burge said



Lizzy Favret drives down the court during a 39-38 victory over NDCL, Jan. 13 at home. Photo by Camryn Dozier

Favret is a good teammate and leader. "She is coachable and makes others around her want to play hard no matter what," she said.

McIntosh said he admires Favret's attitude. "A player of her caliber could be arrogant or difficult to coach, but she's not that. "She accepts coaching, and we work together to improve the team on and off the court," he said.

Favret said that her favorite career moment came during her 17-point performance against rival Mentor Cardinals, which helped the Raiders triumph 45-41 on Jan. 13.

"It was a big upset. It was really fun to beat them," Favret said.

Said Burge, "Lizzy is an amazing teammate. Being in Lizzy's presence is a great feeling."